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## WIRED Grant Targets Advanced Workforce Training

Jackson, Mississippi – A \$5 million federal grant to plan, design and create centers for excellence in advanced manufacturing and help Mississippi workers attain higher job skills has been approved, it was announced today by Sens. Thad Cochran and Trent Lott, and Gov. Haley Barbour.

The federal grant from the U.S. Department of Labor would create centers for workforce development and job training specializing in metal-related and construction crafts covering 18 southeastern Mississippi counties hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina. The basic concept is to help Mississippi workers attain higher, more advanced skills so they can fill a huge shortage in metal and construction trades in the state's growing economy.

"Mississippi has an enormous need for advanced workforce development and job training. The unique partnership funded under this grant will bring together the state, including our community college system, workforce investment boards, agencies of the federal government and the private sector to establish multi-regional centers for excellence to train workers in advanced manufacturing trades, with special emphasis on metal trades, such as welding," Governor Barbour said.

"Mississippi's workforce must be equipped with the skills needed to fill available jobs in our state. The partnership between economic development engines in Mississippi, the Department of Labor, community colleges, and Mississippi businesses will benefit our state's unemployed or under-employed workforce," Senator Cochran said. "I am pleased the federal government has recognized the merits of Momentum Mississippi's WIRED program and the opportunity for our existing workforce to actively contribute to rebuilding South Mississippi's economy following Hurricane Katrina."

"Considering the job market along the Gulf Coast with shipbuilding at Northrop Grumman and steel making at the upcoming ThyssenKrupp facility, having skilled metal trades workers will grow even more important to South Mississippi's economy and its future development," Senator Lott said. "I've been pleased to work with Governor Barbour and local officials to help secure this federal support, and I must say Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao has been very

supportive of Mississippi and especially attentive to our hurricane recovery and economic growth needs.”

WIRED stands for Workforce Innovation In Regional Economic Development.

The project will be managed through Momentum Mississippi, which was formed by Governor Barbour in 2005 with the mission to develop and oversee the state’s long range economic development plan. The new grant, called Momentum WIRED, will implement a goal to transform the current workforce system by making it more responsive to the needs of businesses.

The first Centers for Excellence will be located at Jones County Junior College and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, which will serve as models for the Momentum WIRED project.

More than 72,000 Mississippians work in metal-related trades, including shipbuilding, oil and gas exploration and production, petroleum refining and petrochemical manufacturing, along with commercial construction, homebuilding, automotive manufacturing and the steel industry. Despite the impact of Hurricane Katrina, jobs in metal-related industries grew by more than 28 percent between 2002 and 2006.

Counties included in the initial phase of the grant include Clarke, Covington, Forrest, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River, Perry, Smith, Stone, and Wayne.

Mississippi currently shares a WIRED grant with the State of Alabama that deals with developing an innovative job training system in the East Mississippi and West Alabama region.

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